
Southeast Asia Air Combat Data

By

**Tom Smith
Defense Security Cooperation Agency**

Since 1994, the humanitarian demining offices in the Defense Security Cooperation Agency and U.S. Pacific Command, in conjunction with Management Support Technology, Inc. and the Air Force History Support Office, have been developing an informational/relational database derived from the separate declassified tapes of allied air combat and combat support operational activities conducted during the war in Indochina. The outputs of this analysis will provide nations in the region with accurate target and ordnance data so that host countries can set priorities for unexploded ordnance (UXO) clearance operations and assess the probability of UXO contamination in areas identified for economic development.

These combat missions were conducted in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam from 1965 to 1975. The original data system developed by IBM in the early 1960s captured daily air combat information on the Vietnam Conflict in the National Combat Command Information Processing System (NIPS). The data, classified top secret, was maintained by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and in 1976 declassified and delivered to the National Archives for safekeeping.

Four major databases are being reviewed for information that will assist nations in determining the scope and scale of air bombardment, helping to prioritize bomb and mine clearance operations. These files are Combat Activities File (CACTA - October 1965 - December 1970); Southeast Asia Database (SEADAB - January 1970-June 1975); the Strategic Air Command's Combat Activities report (SACCOACT - June 1965 - August 1973); and herbicide data files- (HERBS - July 1965 - February 1971).

Data available include specific mission numbers, type and number of aircraft, location of target, latitude/longitude coordinates, ordnance type, number of ordnance dropped, and additional information on downed aircraft.

The goal of this combined effort is to provide host nation mine action office with geospatial information (maps, digital, and other data) to support humanitarian demining surveys, setting priorities for demining operations, training, and assessment of the mine and UXO threat to economic development activities. The recovered data are being incorporated into geospatial databases for analysis by the host nation mine action centers using geographical information systems.

Information for Laos has been retrieved, incorporated into a relational database, and installed at the headquarters of the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Program (UXO LAO) in the capital city of Vientiane. The air combat information is displayed with vector or raster geospatial data and used to plan unexploded ordnance clearance operations and to assess the probable impact of UXO on economic development projects.

Herbicide mission data has also been incorporated into the geographic information system at UXO LAO. Herbicide mission data was obtained from the U.S. Armed Services Center for Research of Unit Records which also is the source for substantiation of veteran's claims of

herbicide contact. Data includes the original HERBS tapes plus man-portable, truck, and helicopter missions that were conducted during the conflict.

The partnership between DSCA and its contractors is also in the process of developing a more user friendly informational and relational database and look-up tables to better assist the end user in planning for and prioritizing bomb clearance missions in specific areas of the country. A prototype web accessible version of the geospatial data is also in the developmental phase and will make it easier for host nations to access the data without a major investment in information technology equipment.

Maintaining the work on this project is essential for continuing assistance to Laos and possible expansion to the Cambodian Mine Action Center and the newly established Vietnamese Centre for Treating Technology Bombs and Mines. The project will continue to support our government's engagement strategy in the region.

In October 2000, a senior Vietnamese military delegation visited the United States to observe demining training activities and discuss ways in which our two countries could begin engagement by sharing information on demining issues. The delegation was extremely impressed with the bombing data retrieval project and, as a result, President Clinton offered to provide the information to the Vietnamese government during his historic visit to Vietnam in November 2000.

About the Author

Tom Smith is the Program Manager, for Humanitarian Assistant and Demining Programs, for the USCENCOM, USPACOM and James Madison University.